KNOW THE SIGNS



A Back-to-School Guide to Spot Bullying.

Know the signs. Start the conversation. Don't let them face it alone.

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ONE IN THREE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE BULLYING DON'T TELL THEIR PARENTS.

If you know or suspect that your child is experiencing bullying behaviour, it can be very upsetting. You may feel unsure about what to do to support them. This guide will help you to know the signs of bullying, know how to start a conversation, and what to do next if you are worried.

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FROM THE DIANA AWARD

"Bullying behaviour is repeated, negative behaviour that is intended to make others feel upset, uncomfortable or unsafe. This can happen both online and offline."

A young person might be hesitant to tell you about bullying behaviour. They may feel embarrassed, upset or angry. They may worry that, by speaking out, they will make the problem worse.



VERBAL

Using speech, sign language or verbal gestures to intentionally hurt others. It includes name-calling, threats, insults, teasing, or verbal abuse.



PHYSICAL

Intentionally hurting others physically. This might include hitting, pushing, blocking someone's way, damaging belongings, or making someone feel physically unsafe.



SOCIAL OR INDIRECT

Negative actions which are neither verbal nor physical. For example, excluding someone, spreading rumours, turning others against them, or leaving them out of friendship groups.



ONLINE

Using tech to hurt others. This includes posting offensive pictures or messages; accessing someone's account without permission; creating fake accounts to impersonate or harass someone, or creating deepfake images using AI.

Bullying is behaviour that is intended to hurt, upset, intimidate, exclude or humiliate someone. It is often repeated and usually involves an imbalance of power. It's important to remind young people that you are there for them and will listen to their concerns.



WHAT ABOUT "BANTER"?



Banter becomes bullying when one person is no longer laughing, feels humiliated, targeted, frightened or unable to make it stop.

A helpful question to ask if you think a young person might be experiencing bullying banter is: ***"Are they laughing with you, or at you?"***

If the same child is repeatedly the joke, repeatedly left out, or looks uncomfortable, it needs to be taken seriously.

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WE'VE PUT TOGETHER SIX WARNING SIGNS THAT PARENTS AND CARERS NEED TO LOOK OUT FOR. THESE ARE SIX POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY BE EXPERIENCING BULLYING.



LOSING INTEREST

Becoming quieter, withdrawn or no longer enjoying usual hobbies



MOOD CHANGES

Seeming anxious, upset, irritable, low, changes in sleep/appetite



SCHOOL RELUCTANCE

Avoiding school, certain lessons, break times, lunch or the journey in



FRIENDSHIP CHANGES

Suddenly alone, left out, excluded or friendship groups changing



BELONGINGS DAMAGED OR MISSING

Coming home with damaged things, missing belongings or unexplained marks



ONLINE CHANGES

Hiding, avoiding or constantly checking their phone or devices

Remember: these signs are about changes. Some children are naturally quiet. Some children prefer small friendship groups. Some children are private about their phone. The concern is when something feels different for them. If you notice a change in mood, confidence, friendships, school life, belongings or phone use, it may be time to gently check-in.

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WHAT THE SIGNS MIGHT LOOK LIKE



LOSING INTEREST

A child may:

- stop doing a hobby they used to enjoy
- spend more time in their room
- avoid clubs, sports or activities
- become quieter after school
- stop talking about friends
- say “I’m fine” but seem different

You might notice:

A football left under the bed, a dance bag untouched, a games console unused, or them saying they “just don’t feel like it anymore.”



MOOD CHANGES

A child may:

- seem anxious, tearful or low
- become irritable or angry
- struggle to sleep
- lose confidence
- criticise themselves
- seem panicked after school or after checking their phone

You might notice:

An untouched lunchbox, a change in appetite, more stomach aches, sudden tears, or comments like “everyone hates me”.



SCHOOL RELUCTANCE

A child may:

- say they don’t want to go to school
- complain of headaches or stomach aches before school
- want to change route or avoid the bus
- ask to be picked up early
- avoid lunch, break times or certain lessons
- become anxious on Sunday evening or before school

You might notice:

School uniform hidden away, feeling ill before school, delays getting ready, or panic around certain days.



FRIENDSHIP CHANGES

A child may:

- suddenly have fewer friends
- stop being invited to things
- be left out of group chats
- sit or walk alone more often
- seem anxious about who they will spend time with
- say “no one likes me”

You might notice:

A party invitation thrown away, no longer being included in plans, friendship groups suddenly changing, or your child seeming worried about lunch and break times.



BELONGINGS DAMAGED OR MISSING

A child may have

- unexplained cuts or bruises
- damaged uniform
- broken or lost equipment
- missing lunch money
- vague explanations about what happened

You might notice:

A torn backpack, missing PE kit, broken stationery, or them repeatedly asking for replacements.



ONLINE CHANGES

A child may:

- hide their phone
- turn it face down when notifications appear
- avoid their device completely
- check it constantly
- become upset after looking at messages
- delete apps, accounts or messages
- leave group chats

You might notice:

A phone hidden under a pillow, constant buzzing, sudden secrecy, or distress after online activity.

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HOW TO START A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Your child may be worried you will panic, get angry, or make the situation worse. You do not have to ask directly, "Are you being bullied?"

TRY SAYING:

"I've noticed you seem a bit quieter lately. I'm not angry — I just want to check you're okay."

"Is there anyone at school making things harder for you?"

"If something is going on, we can work through it together."

"Is there a time of day that feels difficult — break, lunch, lessons, the bus, or online?"

IF THEY SAY "I'M FINE", TRY:

"OK. I won't push you. I just want you to know I've noticed something feels different, and I care."

"You don't have to talk now. Could we go for a walk later, or chat in the car?"

"I'll check in again another time. You can also write it down or text me if that feels easier."

IF THEY ARE SCARED THAT TELLING YOU WILL MAKE IT WORSE, TRY:

"I understand why you might be worried. I won't rush into action without speaking to you first, unless I'm worried someone is in danger."

"We can decide the next step together."

"Your safety matters. Let's think about what would help you feel safer tomorrow."

Even loving responses can accidentally make a child feel blamed, dismissed or more worried.

❌ INSTEAD OF ❌	✅ TRY INSTEAD ✅
Just ignore it	You don't have to put up with this. Let's think about what would help you feel safer.
Stand up for yourself	This is not your fault. We can practise what to say, but adults need to help too.
It's just banter	Does it seem funny to you, or does it feel like people are laughing at you?
They're only jealous	Whatever the reason, it's not okay for them to treat you like this.
Why didn't you tell me sooner?	I'm really glad you've told me now.
I'm going straight to the school tomorrow	I do think we need to speak to the school. Let's talk about how we can do that in a way that feels safe to you.
Give me your phone, I'm sorting this	Let's look at what's happening together. We can save evidence and decide what to do next.

Remember, the most powerful thing a parent or carer can say is:

"Thank you for telling me. I believe you. This is not your fault. We'll work through it together."

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OUR 5 STEP GUIDE TO FOLLOW IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

It can be emotional when you are worried about your child. Try to stay calm and be reassuring.

1: LISTEN AND REASSURE

Say:

"Thank you for trusting me."
"I believe you."
"You have done the right thing by telling me."
"This is not your fault."
"You are not alone."

2: WRITE DOWN WHAT HAS HAPPENED

It can help to keep a record of:

- What happened
- Where and when it happened
- Who was involved
- Who saw it
- Whether it happened online or offline
- How it affected your child
- Who has already been told
- What action has been agreed

3: ASK WHAT THEY WANT TO HAPPEN NEXT

Bullying can make children feel powerless. Involving them in next steps can help them feel some control again.

Ask

"Is there an adult at school you trust?"

"Would you like me to speak to school with you, or for you?"

"Is there anything you do not want to happen?"

"What are you most worried might happen next?"

Make clear that if someone is at risk of harm, adults may need to act to keep people safe.

4: CONTACT THE SCHOOL

Arrange to speak to the form tutor, class teacher, head of year, pastoral lead or safeguarding lead. Try to work with the school, while being clear that your child needs to feel safe.

5: KEEP CHECKING IN

Bullying is rarely solved by one conversation. Keep checking in gently. Agree a review date with school. Ask your child what has improved and what still feels difficult.

Ask

"What was the best part of today?"

"Did anything feel easier today?"

"Did anything still feel unsafe?"

"Has anything changed online?"

TIP! WHEN YOUR CHILD WORRIES REPORTING WILL MAKE IT WORSE

Say to school: **"My child is worried about retaliation, so it's important that any action is handled sensitively. Can we agree how they will be kept safe and how staff will monitor the situation without making them feel exposed?"**

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APPROACHING THE SCHOOL

It can be emotional when you are worried about your child. Try to stay calm and be reassuring.

- Check the Anti-Bullying Policy - usually found on the school website or student planner.
- Don't let your own experience of schools get in the way of your child's experience and be aware that schools are busy places so you may not be able to see someone straight away.
- Try not to take your child out of school if there is no immediate danger. This can make it harder for them to go back to school and more difficult for the school to resolve the issue.
- Avoid talking to the parents / carers of the young person exhibiting bullying behaviour. Whilst this may be tempting, it can make the situation worse.

EXAMPLE EMAIL

Dear [Name],

I am concerned that my child may be experiencing bullying.

We have noticed some changes in their mood, behaviour, friendships and school routine, and they have shared some concerns with us.

Please could we arrange a meeting with their form tutor/head of year/pastoral lead/safeguarding lead to discuss:

- **what has happened**
- **what support can be put in place**
- **how the school will help them feel safe**
- **how any online bullying linked to school will be handled**
- **how we will stay updated**

I would also be grateful if you could share the school's anti-bullying policy and confirm who will be the named member of staff supporting my child.

Many thanks,
[Name]

Send

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN A SCHOOL MEETING

- Who will be the named adult my child can go to?
- How can my child report anything else that happens?
- Where does the bullying seem to be happening?
- What will be done around break, lunch, corridors, toilets, buses or changing rooms?
- How will you prevent retaliation?
- How will my child be updated?
- When will we review progress?
- What should I do if my child comes home worried again?

TIP! IF A SCHOOL SAYS IT IS "JUST FRIENDSHIP ISSUES"

Tell them: "I understand friendship issues happen, but my child is feeling unsafe and this appears to be repeated. I'd like us to agree a plan to monitor it and support them."

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If you don't feel listened to and the first response is not enough:

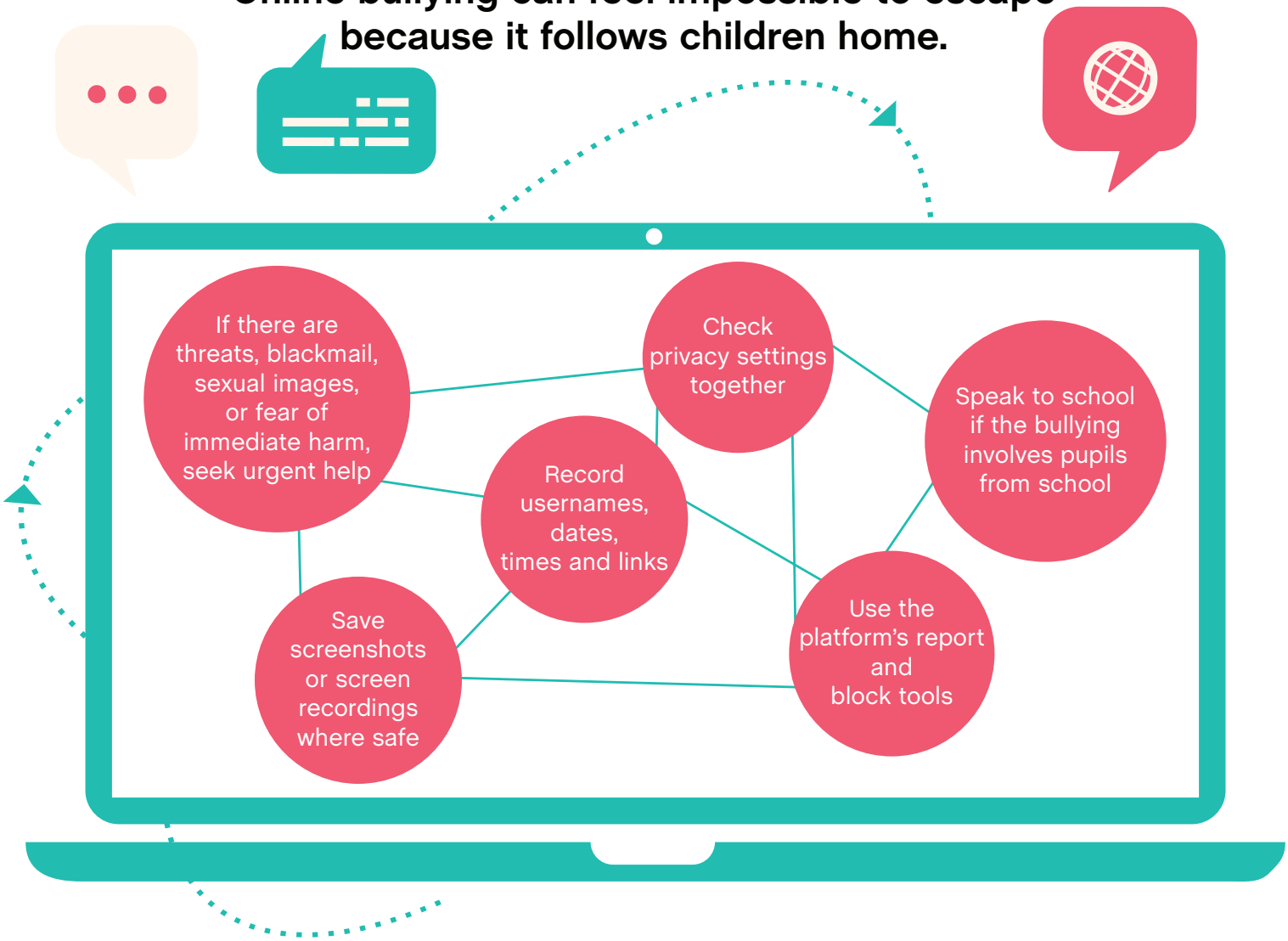
- Ask for the school's anti-bullying policy
- Put your concerns in writing, including dates, examples and any evidence
- Ask for a named member of staff to support your child
- Ask for a written action plan and review date
- Escalate to the head of year, pastoral lead, safeguarding lead or senior leadership team
- If things still do not improve, follow the school's complaints process

USEFUL PHRASE:

Tell them: "I appreciate the support so far, but my child is still feeling unsafe. Please can we agree what further action will be taken, who is responsible, and when we will review it?"

HOW TO TACKLE ONLINE BULLYING

Online bullying can feel impossible to escape because it follows children home.



Try not to immediately take their phone away as a punishment. If bullying is happening online, they may worry that telling you means losing access to friends, support or evidence.

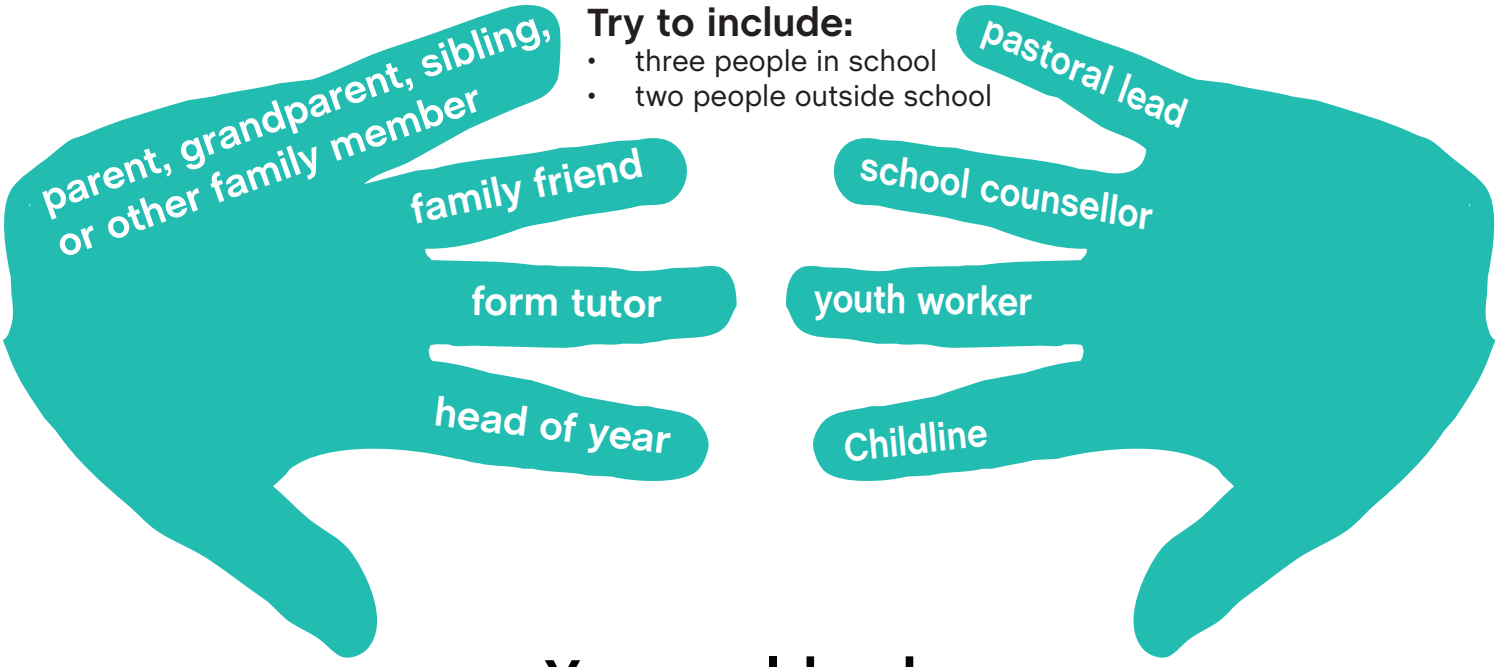
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HELP YOUR CHILD BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

Ask your child to draw around their hand.
On each finger, write one person they could speak to if they needed help.



You could ask:

"Who feels safe to talk to at school?"

"Who listens well?"

"Who could you go to if I wasn't there?"

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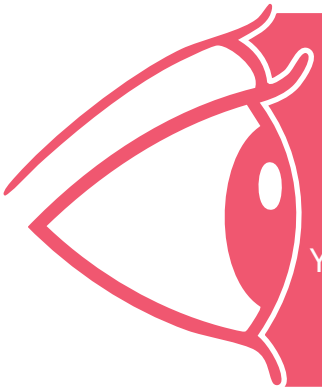
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IF YOU'RE A YOUNG PERSON READING THIS

If you are being bullied, it is not your fault. You deserve to feel safe at school, online and with your friends.

- tell an adult you trust
- write down what has happened
- save evidence if it is happening online
- avoid retaliating, even when it is hard
- block and report abusive accounts
- ask someone to come with you if you are scared to speak to school
- keep telling people until someone helps

If the first person you tell does not listen, tell someone else.



IF YOU SEE SOMEONE BEING BULLIED

You do not have to be best friends with someone to help them.

- ask if they are okay
- sit with them
- include them
- tell a trusted adult
- refuse to laugh or join in
- report online abuse
- check in privately afterwards.

IF YOU SEE BULLYING ONLINE

- report the post, message, account or group
- do not share it further
- send the person a supportive message
- tell an adult if you are worried about them



ONE KIND ACTION CAN MAKE SOMEONE FEEL LESS ALONE.

Speak out. Stand up. Be kind.

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INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

Schools can support our Know The Signs campaign by making sure pupils, parents and staff know what to do if bullying happens.

SCHOOLS CAN:

- Remind pupils how to report bullying
- Make sure pupils know who their trusted adults are
- Check high-risk spaces like corridors, toilets, lunch areas, changing rooms and buses
- Share this parent guide at the start of term
- Run a tutor-time or assembly discussion
- Train pupils as Anti-Bullying Ambassadors
- Make sure staff respond consistently when bullying is reported
- Check in with pupils who may be isolated or anxious

IF A CHILD REPORTS BULLYING TO YOU

- Thank them for telling you
- Reassure them they have done the right thing
- Listen without judgement
- Ask what happened, where, when and who was involved
- Ask what they are worried might happen next
- Consult your anti-bullying policy
- Speak to the safeguarding lead if you are concerned about harm or welfare
- Agree next steps and keep the child updated
- Check in again after action has been taken

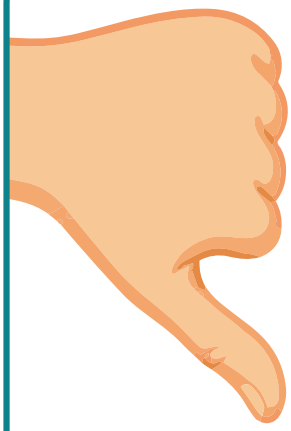
A child may only tell an adult once. The response they receive can shape whether they ask for help again.

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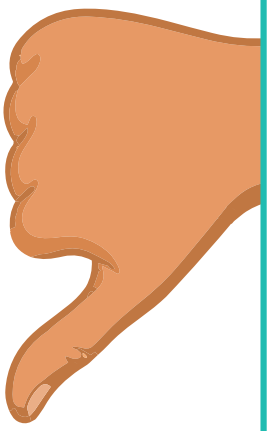
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START THE CONVERSATION
DON'T LET THEM FACE IT ALONE

Call 999
If someone is in immediate danger

Childline – 0800 1111
For children and young people

Samaritans – 116 123
For anyone struggling to cope

ANTIBULLYINGPRO.COM
For bullying advice and resources

If you are a young person in crisis:
TEXT DA TO 85258 FOR FREE, CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT, 24/7

This guide is brought to you by:
ITV This Morning and is supported by The Diana Award

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